

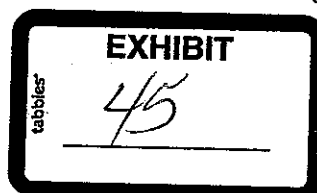
Honorable Judge Peeler,

I am writing you this letter to request that you consider allowing me an early release from my four-year prison sentence. I have been living at the Ohio Reformatory for Women since October 31, 2011, after leaving the Warren County jail. Although I did not take the opportunity to speak publically at my trial, there are some things that I would like to share with you now in order to help you make your decision about my judicial release.

I would like to begin by saying how ashamed I am of my actions and behaviors that led to my incarceration. With all of the education and training I have had in mental/emotional health and substance abuse, I did not ask for help when I certainly needed it. Looking back at my life during the fall of 2010, I can clearly see how I was beginning a downward spiral that led to very poor decision making and some very serious consequences for me and others. I knew my depression was deepening, my workload was increasing and my sleep deprivation was worsening. Instead of turning to my family for support (and knowing my place of employment was not a safe place to turn for help), I retreated into the "safety" of my solitude. Against my better judgment, I started down the slippery slope of drinking wine in the evenings to aid in sleeping instead of cutting back on my work hours, reducing my stress, and making time to see my doctor. I can clearly see now how flawed my thinking was and how dangerous it was. At the time, I knew it wasn't the best decision to maintain that hectic lifestyle, but I rationalized that I would be able to handle it.

I always had pulled through before. Sadly, that was not the case this time. I was so broken down that I prayed for God to help me out of the mess I had created by my selfish thinking. God knew I was not paying attention to the little hints to change, so it was going to take something big to get my attention. The situations I allowed myself to be involved with are inexcusable and could have been prevented if I had only been willing to ask for help. I have always had a strong sense of morals and values and know the difference between right and wrong. Unfortunately, my decision to drink wine impaired my ability to make decisions, and I opened the door to compromise my beliefs. I have never been in trouble with the law before. I have always stayed true to my beliefs and maintained my strong faith and work ethic to be a stable, contributing member of society. I take my commitments and oaths seriously. I realize my choices and actions not only are an embarrassment to myself and my family but also reflect poorly on my professions of educator and athletic trainer as well as my places of employment. I also realize my choices and actions have caused harm to the five young men who came to my house as well as their families and close friends. My choices and actions also harmed all of my students, athletes, parents and co-workers who looked up to me and trusted me to always do the right thing.

Since I have been in prison, I have taken every opportunity to heal and work on becoming a healthier individual as well as giving back to the other women here. I requested to be on the yard crew for my job. There are only a small number of people who have the privilege of working this job. By doing this, it provided me with an opportunity to take care of the prison grounds by shoveling snow, cutting grass, edging, trimming trees, painting, cleaning out condemned buildings, taking trash to the dumpster, separating the recyclables, disposing of "hot trash," and various other duties as decided by the captains. This is a job that takes a large amount of trust as I am working out of direct supervision in tempting



situations where one could break the rules. I take a lot of pride in keeping the prison grounds looking professional and clean for all of the inmates, workers and visitors.

Additionally, I work in Hale cottage (where I live) as a tutor for women who are trying to pass their pre-GED and GED tests. Since I have always been passionate about teaching and I value education, I was honored to be given this chance by the sergeant in Hale to assist these women in their goal to further their education. I have been specifically working on reading, writing and mathematics, although a few women are starting science and history as well. I applaud these women for being brave enough to acknowledge they need help to better themselves and for trying to improve their lives through education. It is equally as rewarding for me as it is for them when they pass another section of their test! They come with genuine gratitude to thank me, but my reward is seeing the excitement in their eyes when they actually understand what we have been working on. They don't always get the personal attention in their classes and often get frustrated. When they come to me for help and make that commitment to take control of their lives, I am reminded of how I will no longer make excuses for myself, and I will have the courage to ask for help when needed.

Another area I have been able to assist with at ORW is the pre-release program for inmates in Arn-1. They are able to apply to be accepted into the program and have a separate dorm, special perks, and a variety of programs not available to other inmates such as education, religion, wellness, vocational choices, etc. The mental health director for the prison contacted me to ask if I would be willing to plan and implement a wellness class for 30 women in the wellness tract. The next day I gave her a syllabus, and we discussed my plan. The following day I began teaching a two-day-per-week, 90-minute wellness class incorporating meditation, yoga, healthy eating, decision making, stress reduction, and service activities for the women.

It is such a pleasure to share techniques with these women who are trying to make positive changes in their lives to insure their rate of recidivism will be zero. They have opened up so much to me since the course began and have allowed themselves to become vulnerable in order to heal and grow. I have had the pleasure of meeting their families in the visiting hall where they share with me how their loved one is developing into a healthy, mature woman and then thank me for assisting in this process. I always thank them in return, because these women teach me daily how to become a better person through their courage to grow.

Another wonderful opportunity I have had since arriving at ORW is to teach a daily yoga class to the other women who were in admissions with me, which then blossomed into the opportunity to teach a weekly class at the rec center open to all inmates. While I was in admissions, I saw how scared and alone these women were and how this caused them to act out. After living in general population, I realized it was the same there too. Fear and loneliness caused many women much unhappiness. After attending yoga classes on a regular basis, they would tell me how freeing it felt to work through their emotions with yoga. Some of these women have been living in the same negative patterns for many years and were open enough to the idea that there might be a better way to live. This again is a lesson for me, which taught me I can always learn and practice healthier ways to deal with my problems.

In addition to my work and volunteer activities at ORW, I have been involved in many activities and groups through mental health. I meet every six weeks with a psychiatrist who diagnosed me as being bipolar. He monitors my medication and behaviors to see if changes need to be made. He very strongly recommended a mood stabilizer when I first arrived, but he gave me the chance to prove to him that I can balance my moods through the various techniques I have learned over the years: staying active, eating healthy foods, getting adequate sleep, reducing stress, practicing yoga, meditating daily, and giving service to others. Although the sleep and nutrition parts are challenging in prison, I have been successful in balancing my moods to the point where I am not taking any additional medication. I have also learned through meetings with my psychologist that my "overactive" schedule is how I keep myself from the more negative, depressive moods that I do not enjoy. Over the years, I learned how to adjust my activities so that I could avoid the darker moods associated with being bipolar.

My psychologist and I spoke about different groups that would be beneficial for me to participate in for my healing. Although many groups have a significantly long waiting list based on out-date, I have completed the Domestic Violence group which taught me warning signs to look for in future relationships and showed me how unhealthy my marriage was. It also made me realize that you do not have to be in a domestic relationship to be in an unhealthy relationship. Through my weak boundaries, I have allowed myself to be manipulated by aggressive individuals, and many of my relationships were "violent." I also attended and received a certificate for a Mental Health Wellness group while in admissions. I am on the waiting list for boundaries courses, a bipolar group and a few other decision-making and healthy-living groups. Even if I do not complete these groups before my release, I plan to seek similar help groups and counseling to grow as an individual.

One group that I requested to be in immediately after arriving at ORW was the Sex Offender group. Although the law has changed and this group is no longer mandatory, I requested that mental health add me to the class list. I realized that I will have a constant reminder of my poor decisions for the rest of my life as I will have to register as a Tier III sex offender every 90 days for as long as I live. More than that, I am aware of the consequences of my choices on others who will have to deal with the hurt and pain caused by my actions. This class only reiterated that point and reminded me how many hurting people there are in this world. I do not want to be the cause of any suffering to any living being ever again in my life. I also created an action plan to identify personal risk factors that I need to be aware of that could trigger becoming involved in harmful situations and how to combat those. The big areas for me would be to abstain from alcohol consumption, insure adequate sleep, keep a reasonable work schedule, set and enforce healthy boundaries for myself and others, and to ask for help when I need it from my support group.

Besides my various jobs and classes/groups, I regularly attend the CODA support group (co-dependents anonymous) and AA support group (alcoholics anonymous) weekly meetings. I have gained much insight into my behaviors by listening to the women in recovery share their stories and growth process. I now know that I am co-dependent in the sense that I want to help everyone—to the detriment of helping myself. I understand that I turned to alcohol to help me sleep instead of taking the time away from my work to make a doctor's appointment or just cut down my schedule. Because of this, it lead me to continue making poor decisions for my own health, which eventually lead to poor decisions that

affected other people's health. I fully realize how significant the consequences of putting my needs behind the needs of others are, and I will no longer delay asking for help when I need it.

Another wonderful opportunity that I have had since arriving at ORW is the chance to deepen my faith through the various religious services offered. Each week, I attend a Catholic mass and a Protestant church service. Twice a month I attend a Buddhist meditation class which is offered twice a day. I have attended weekly bible-study courses and praise-ministry activities when offered. Each of these activities serves to strengthen my faith and encourage my daily meditation practice. I have also had Christian counseling (per my request) through the chaplain's office to overcome hurdles I have been facing that were holding back my spiritual growth. I am eternally grateful for the support and guidance from the chaplain's staff and for the ability to freely express my faith in practice each day while serving time in prison!

I am amazed at how much I have learned from the time I have spent at ORW. Just from observing and listening to the women around me, I have come to realize how much pain and suffering in this world could be prevented through proper educational opportunities and outreach programs to those in society who are so often neglected and left on the streets to fend for themselves. Sadly, the opportunities to work for a healthier future do not seem to be within the grasp for all members of our society. I desperately hope to work to change this imbalance after I am released. There are so many people who are sad, lonely, angry, confused, hurt and seeking approval in prison from ALL walks of life. So many people are just dying inside trying to be seen and heard for who they really are and not knowing the proper ways to express themselves. Among many other plans I have to give back to society and the community after my release from prison, one area I will not neglect is to work with inmates, prison staff, and lawmakers to develop programs for individuals to hopefully prevent them from returning to prison: working with areas such as domestic violence and rape centers; stronger rehabilitation programs for inmates in areas such as religion and decision making as well as drug use for those in prison; wider access for inmates to enroll in programs; prison staff evaluation for continuity in rule enforcement and standard of behavior; medical treatment in prisons; and much work for programs for prisoners being released to set them up for success instead of dumping people back in the same situations from where they came without properly equipping them with the tools necessary to succeed.

Ohio Reformatory for Women is a last resort to help people who need intense restructuring of their lives and should, therefore, provide opportunities to educate, rehabilitate, and help inmates so that upon their release they will have the skills, knowledge and support to be law-abiding citizens. Unfortunately from my experience in prison (which is most likely due to the prison being understaffed and low on resources), many women are scared to leave the safety of these prison walls because they have not yet developed a strong enough moral character to fight their personal demons and regain the confidence and inner guidance to make healthy decisions in their lives. I consider myself lucky to have had the chance to enroll in and attend programs/classes that helped me evaluate the areas in my life that need to be worked on, to have had the chance to work through these issues, and to daily practice setting and enforcing healthy boundaries and healthy decision-making skills.

Your Honor, thank you for considering my judicial release. I respect your decision and realize the difficult job you have to balance and weigh the options of giving chances to people like me by granting an early release versus the consequences to be dealt with if we do not live up to the court's expectations. I have learned throughout the last two years how strong my family and friend support group is and that it is not only okay to ask them for help when I need it, but it is absolutely necessary. I have learned to appreciate even more the value of my education and my ever-growing faith in God. For healthy decision making and boundary setting, I need to use my education, my faith, my moral values, and the yoga philosophy by which I live. I have learned it is never okay to allow myself to get so worn down physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually that I turn my back on everything and everyone that keeps me on the right path in life. I realize now, more than ever, that I can do nothing on my own. It is only through God's grace and strength that I live each day according to His will, and I must ask daily for the guidance to fulfill His purpose for me. I acknowledge that through my wrong mindedness I have brought hurt and pain to numerous individuals who trusted me and had faith in me. I continue to pray daily for the peace and healing for all whom I may have harmed.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stacy Schuler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stacy" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Schuler".

Stacy Schuler